

OFFICE OF MAYOR A C WHARTON, JR. SHELBY COUNTY GOVERNMENT



Statement on Federal Stimulus Plan

Over the past several weeks, Mayor Herenton and I have received a number of inquiries regarding our community's response to *America's Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, commonly referred to as the *Stimulus Plan*. We would like to take this opportunity to describe the process that is currently underway to develop Memphis and Shelby County's list of priority projects that will improve our infrastructure and create jobs for our citizens.

We feel strongly that any requests for funding projects in Memphis and Shelby County will be more compelling, and ultimately more likely to be funded, if we take a coordinated approach by submitting a unified plan. In these difficult economic times, we cannot afford to risk losing funds because of lack of coordination or competing self-interests. We want to make it easy for our elected officials in Washington, D.C., to support our community's funding requests, and the best way to do that is to prepare a single list that prioritizes the projects based on those that qualify under the terms of the *Plan* and which will have the greatest immediate and sustainable impact on our residents.

When we received notification in December that Congress was developing the *Stimulus Plan*, we began working with various government agencies and departments, non-profit groups, hospitals and other businesses in the area to develop the *Stimulus Plan*. We asked that these groups submit to us a "wish list" of projects, based on the limited details that were available about the types of projects and programs that would be considered under the *Stimulus Plan*. Considerable time has been spent throughout the community in compiling these lists.

When the *Stimulus Plan* was approved last week, we were finally able to see the details about what types of projects would be eligible. Some of the projects on our preliminary list are not eligible for funding under the terms and conditions of the *Stimulus Plan*. There are programs in our community that are eligible for funding, but which were not included in the preliminary list. This is why we are working expeditiously to reconcile the preliminary list with the actual language of the 500+ page bill to determine what portions are relevant to our already-identified projects, as well as what portions of the stimulus funding might be available for other worthy projects. Very shortly, we will issue a letter to particular offices and organization who may be eligible for funding, encouraging them to apply for these funds.

To that end, we have convened a team of seven members representing city and county government as well as the business community who are working daily to refine this list for our review. We have asked that

they forward their recommended Priority List to us no later than March 9, 2009. Again, let us reiterate that this list will be comprised of eligible projects that will have the highest impact for our citizens. We have created a document that will help us redefine the discussion about the economic stimulus projects in our community, challenging our local government, public and private sector partners to do more than answer the question “What is the fastest way to spend economic stimulus funding?” Instead, our strategy dares to ask:

- What infrastructure is needed to compete in a new economy rather than investing in the old oil dependent economy?
- How can our projects contribute to a more sustainable region, healthier neighborhoods, and better jobs for our citizens?
- How can we move poor urban families into the economic mainstream and reduce our crippling rate of poverty?

We have received several inquiries regarding why we have not been included on official government websites that post the “lists” of other cities around the country. It is important to note that these “lists” were part of an effort to garner support for the concept of a stimulus package rather than an effort to identify the actual projects that would eventually be funded. Until the Stimulus Bill was passed last week, no one knew what the terms and conditions of the *Plan* would actually be, making development of any official list premature. Those cities that participated in such “lists” are now doing what we are doing – reconciling their list with the reality of the Stimulus legislation. We feel strongly that our approach – developing a preliminary list pending development of the actual legislation – was the more prudent approach, in that we did not unrealistically raise expectations in our community for projects and programs that would prove to be ineligible.

Some opportunities we know will exist for best use of stimulus funds include:

- the enhancement of health information technology infrastructure aimed at improving health care quality and care coordination while reducing medical errors and cutting costs, which could fund much-needed advancements at the Regional Medical Center in Memphis (The MED) and other area hospitals
- additional funding for the Community Oriented Policing Service’s (COPS) Universal Hiring Program, which could be used to hire and rehire additional career law enforcement officers
- funding for restoration, repair, construction of roadway and bridge infrastructure, which could be used to repair and replace bridges throughout Shelby County
- funding for construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, resurfacing, restoration, and operational improvements to highways, bridges, or public roads, which could be used to complete Veterans Parkway in north Shelby County which will help us attract industry and create employment opportunities and capital investment
- funding for job training programs for adults, dislocated workers and youth, including funds for summer employment for youth up to 24 yrs of age

The Stimulus bill contains a number of opportunities for our community, which take different forms – some are new programs, some are expansions of existing programs; some require formal grant applications and others are pass through funds from other entities. However, there is not a central repository for our “Stimulus List” or any specific due date; rather, it is an opportunity for us to define, as a community, what our priorities are, so that as various agencies and offices throughout our area apply for the actual grants and programs, they will carry the official support of both the City of Memphis and Shelby County, reflecting that they are priorities that will provide true benefit for our citizens.